



DON'T BE BLINDED BY WINTER'S BEAUTY -- SNOW CAN BE HARD ON THE EYES

V Corps Safety Office release

A bright fresh coat of snow can be a joy to behold on a clear winter day, but it can also hold potential dangers for unprotected eyes.

Snow blindness -- also called niphablepsia or ophthalmia nivalis -- is a normally temporary loss of vision caused by exposure of the eyes to bright sunlight reflected from snow or ice. It can occur even on cloudy or overcast days or during snow storms if cloud cover is thin.

Snow blindness can be very painful, because the ultraviolet rays of the sun burn the cornea, the protective covering of the eye. Its symptoms include a sensation of grit in the eyes; pain in and over the eyes that increases with eyeball movement; inflammation; red and teary eyes, and a headache that intensifies with continued exposure to light. On occasion a victim will have trouble distinguishing between colors, and may see everything colored red. The condition can last from several days to a week.

In most cases, snow blindness lasts from several days to a week, and goes away after a person relieves the fatigue of the retina by resting indoors out of bright light. However, in rare cases, prolonged exposure to the reflected light can lead to solar retinopathy, a disorder that may result in some permanent loss of vision.

Prevention of snow blindness is as easy as wearing sunglasses or dark-colored goggles. Eye protection that offers the following features is frequently recommended:

- 99-100 percent ultraviolet absorption
- Polycarbonate or CR-39 lenses
- 5-10 percent visible light transmittance
- Large lenses that fit close to the face
- Wraparound or "side-shielded" lenses that prevent exposure to peripheral or incidental light

There are other ways that unprotected eyes are susceptible to the ravages of extreme cold as well.

When exposed to cold and high wind without protection, the cornea can freeze. To treat a frozen cornea, place a warm compress or warm hand over the affected eye. After thawing, keep the eye completely covered for 24 to 48 hours.

When the eyes water in the cold, eyelashes can freeze together and hamper vision. The treatment is simply to place a warm hand over the eye until the ice melts, and then reopen the eye.

